The
Ballarat Naturalist

February 2017

Mineral Madness Club night, 2 Dec

Presented by Steve Sorrell

Steve has talked to the Club previously about his interest in minerals, and specifically about minerals around Ballarat. But on this occasion we were taken a long way from home - to the annual *Gem and Mineral Show* in Tucson, Arizona, which Steve has attended several times in the past decade. This massive show is the culmination of around 40 other mineral, gem and jewelry events that occur in the USA and is attended by tens of thousands of collectors, buyers, sellers and other mineral-(or fossil)-minded people. The population of the desert city soars by over 50 000 during January-February when the show is held.

We learned that Steve is a self-taught but a rather serious 'mineral collector' with special interests in *historic minerals*, and is also an artist specialising in painting mineral specimens. He has around 1800 different mineral 'species' and over 7000 specimens of minerals. He has presented talks on Australian minerals and his art at the Tucson mineral shows, and he meets up regularly with other collectors and sellers in Tucson, who have become his good friends. We were shown slides of minerals of various shapes and sizes, and varying in value from a few to over a million USD.

Photo: Steve holding a kunzite crystal (a gem variety of the lithium mineral spodumene) valued at over $100,000US.

Photo: P Carr and P Williamson from the University of Wollongong, setting up display case at 2015 Tucson Gem and Mineral Show

It is hard to grasp the magnitude of the Tucson show or the atmosphere at all the exhibitions, museums and sales venues that occur at such shows. However Steve's slides gave us an idea of the vast range of events and attendees for whom minerals are a major part of life.

We thank Steve for his talk and for reminding us that nature is boundless in the different ways it inspires human interest and imagination.

John Petheram

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Exc: Canadian Regional Park & Buninyong Gardens

Being December the excursion was an afternoon one, finishing with a Christmas breakup picnic. A twelve- membered group entered the Canadian Regional Park (CRP) (indigenous name: Woowookarung) via Cathie St., off Eureka St. We continued along the street into Boundary Road with the natural bush to the right which was part of the park.

In this report I will not attempt to name all the plants both indigenous and weeds that we noted as lists of these can be found on our website. I will only mention those which were remarkable to us in some way. One object of the excursion was to show members some of the work being done by FNCB members (and helpers from other groups) in monitoring vegetation change at CRP. The

Photo: Field Nats at Stop 1

object of that work is to provide data that can inform the future sound management of the Park.

Our first stop was at a crossroad with Foos Lane to the left and Kennedy St. to the right, which becomes Clayton St. further west. This site was a great place for a lookout as it provides a good view across this new park and forms a backdrop to, and view of the city of Ballarat.

A plant noted at this point was the Silky Daisy Bush *Olearia mysinoides.* John Gregurke showed us photos, one taken in 2013 of this area after clearing of Blue Gum plantations, and then another taken in 2016 after three years of regeneration. Some areas near forest remnants have regenerated quite well with native species, while other areas are dominated by invasive weeds such as English Broom *Cytisus scoparius*.

Photo: Silky Daisy Bush

We continued along Boundary Rd. to the next photo point, named CF4A at the entrance to the private property, numbered 298. Here we re-sited one of the 17 photos points (4A) at a point 15 m north of the road, and members assisted in recording the abundance of plant species, using our survey method. We found 27 different species and estimated how much of the area within the 10 metre radius, each of them covered. (Details of this survey technique and results will be available on the FNCB Website.) A large snake was detected in this plot and was not identified but its presence reduced the participation at that point!

Sun Feb 5 Half-day Excursion: ***Scotsburn Fire recovery***

Usual departure arrangements

Half day, including lunch in the Scotsburn area

In the afternoon, 2pm we are invited to

Bill Murphy's 90th birthday celebration at Rosebank

Birdlife meeting -Tues 14 Feb Interesting presentation

by Ken Gosbell Topic: *Wading birds*

Site 3 was an unscheduled one as we stopped to admire a wide and colourful display of native peas that caught our attention on the left in the natural bush: Trailing Shaggy Pea *Podolobium procumbens,* Smooth Parrotpea Dillwynia glaberrima and Wedgepea *Gompholobium heuglii.* Raising itself above the yellow-orange mass was purple Heath Milkwort *Comesperma ericinum and* further up the bank was Slender Riceflower *Pimelia linifolia.*

We proceeded onto Bakers Rd., past the closed exit to Katy Ryans Rd to the Photo Point CF14. At this site we examined John's photos taken in 2013 of views to the north, south east and west. When compared to the present views it is easy to see the improved vegetation cover in this particular area, with Blackwood *Acacia melanoxylon* and Drooping Cassinia *Cassinia arcuat*a appearing as major native species. One plant we were pleased to see among the 30 indigenous plants and eight weeds was Running Postman *Kennedia prostrata.* The tallest plants and tree seedling showed the effect of wind that had formed holes in the soil around their stems.

Next we drove along Dozed Rd. and, rather than drive up a badly rutted track, we walked a few hundred yards in natural bush along a roadside to Photo Point CF16, a forest remnant site. While walking through the bush, the plants we saw included Blue Pincushion *Brunonia australis, S*mooth Parrot-pea *Dillwyinia sp*, Penny-leaf Flat-pea*, Platylobium rotunda* ,Common Beard Heath *Leucopogon virgatus*

Silky Tea Tree *Leptospermum myrsinoides* and Milkmaid *Burchardia umbellate.* We examined photos taken in 2013 and noted that the vegetation in the bush had not changed much except near the piles of recently-dumped garden waste. The Grass Trees *Xanthorhoea australia* at this site are infected with the disease Phytopthora

Photo: Smooth Parrot Pea

Photo: Common Wedge Pea

Rootrot *P. cinnamomi* which does not appear to have changed much since 2013.

As it was nearing 4 pm we left the Regional Park for the Buninyong Gardens. After a cuppa in the Queen Victoria Rotunda in the Gardens which was built "for the rich and poor" to use and enjoy Lorraine Powell, a member of *Friends of the Gardens* told us much of the history of the Gardens beginning with the time when it was an important area for the aboriginal clans when the aborigines farmed the Murnong plant for food in this area. Then Lorraine took us for a walk around the Gardens and the Gong noting special features on the way. We hurried a little as the rain was beginning to fall. By the time we were back in the rotunda there was a good shower of rain which lasted until we had picnicked, wished each other a happy Christmas and travelled home.

Throughout our excursion in the Regional Park and our walk around the Buninyong Gardens we saw a few birds including: Black Shoulder Kite, Wedge-tailed Eagle, Little Ravens, New Holland Honeyeater, Wood Ducks, Pacific Black Duck and Coots.

Fran Hanrahan

NB FNCB excursion, Sun 5 March 2017 to Western Treatment Plant *at Werribee leaving at* ***8.30am****.*
The sewage ponds attract a large range of migratory waders, ducks and other water birds during summer.
We need to notify before excursion, Melbourne Water during business hours of the people and cars that will be going. Each car must have a permit holder.
At Feb. meeting list to be made of people to attend*: current permit holders (one for each car) and willing drivers.*
If not at the meeting, contact John Gregurke before 17 February.

Excerpts from club Meeting Minutes Dec, 2016

Opening and Apologies

Attendance: President welcomed 23 members and a visitor. Apol.: K & B Elder, S Kruss, M Keatley, T Fletcher, A & I Bone, A Riddell, M Landry, B Murphy, M Sorrell, P Norquay, E Swan, M Moravec and J Morrish.

Business Arising from Previous Club Meeting:

Emily gave Elspeth a USB stick with 900+ plant records from Castlemaine.

Correspondence: IN (since last Club Meeting on November 4, 2016):

From Rod Lowther, GFNC: positive feedback on Stella Bedggood Memorial Lecture & provision of two options for a joint GFNC / FNCB field trip next year (2017): From Donna McMaster, DELWP: invitation to road-test the prototype Victorian Biodiversity Atlas field app

OUT (since last Club Meeting on November 4, 2016): To Leslie Perkins, Castlemaine FNC: condolence card on death of husband Ern, long-time dedicated field naturalist. To Kathie Ensor: provision of information about the identity of orchids she had recently found at Mt Beckworth; provision of orchid species list for Mt Beckworth.

Business Arising from Correspondence:

Emily completed a submission re. the VEAC terms of reference for their assessment of the natural values of the Wombat Forest, Mt Cole, Pyrenees Ranges and Wellsford forests on behalf of the Club.

Inventory of the interpretative signs/ tree labels at the La Gerche Trail: field work completed by John P., Carol H. and Renee W. Renee put together a spreadsheet of the data which has been supplied to Parks Victoria.

Reports:

Treasurer's Report: Opening bal: $8078.85 Income $102 Expenses $96.65 Closing bal: $8084.20

Children's Week Activity with Botani Kids: Val H., Les H. and a couple of members of Birdlife Ballarat provided a nature walk for more than 20 preschoolers, primary-school-aged children and their parents at Lake Wendouree, highlighting wattles, reeds, ducks, swans, etc. Likely to be a yearly event.

Road-testing the prototype Victorian Biodiversity Atlas field app.: Three members attended. Emily reported that whilst the prototype is in its early stages, it shows great promise in simplifying the data recording/ entry process.

Climate Change Forum at Narmbool on November 28: 4 members attended, each noting different highlights and limitations. One felt that there wasn't enough attention to overcoming the psychology of climate denial and inaction, others enjoyed the application of indigenous knowledge and hands-on experience of a vigneron to the challenges of mitigation and adaptation.

La Gerche Trail Inventory: John P. explained that the way point data, maps and photos of each sign/ label have been gathered by three club members and provided to Parks Vic.

The Rakali Talk by Australian Platypus Conservancy: Three members attended. Carol H. reported on a thorough, well put-together talk on the fasci-

nating lives of Rakali and ongoing research to learn more about them. Data sheets were passed around for members to record any locations where they had seen Rakali, to be provided to the APC.

General Business

The Mid Murray FNC's 50th Anniversary celebrations are to be held at Easter and the Dalmans are hoping to go and support the event.

Show and Tell

Ken H noted Little Ravens nest-building at Midland Tce, Doveton St,.

Margaret T reported Lapwing Plovers nesting on median strip had two chicks at the corner of Sturt St and Pleasant St,. At Nerrina, the Ravens nesting next door regularly came to her place to feed, and in the back garden of a house in Brunswick, she spotted two Tawny Frogmouths in a gum tree. A picnic near the Beauchamp Falls in the Otways was also enlivened by a male Satin Bowerbird foraging, and carrying away small orange fungi. John G enjoyed finding 12 Plumed Whistling Duck on Nov. 19 at a swamp in Modesty Lane, then 30 more a week later on a farm dam west of Mt Callender at Dunn's Marsh. John also told us of his discovery of Paper Sunray *Rhodanthe corymbiflora* at Whitestone Swamp off Ercildoune Rd. Claire D told us that in mid November, Mt Beckworth was looking in need of care, with lots of weeds, many tracks potholed/ washed away/ closed and the toilets out-of-action. Nevertheless, the Chocolate Lilies were flowering en masse (unlike last year when very few flowered), and some Sun Orchids were flowering.

Elizabeth T. was awed in July by the mass flowering of white-flowered Native Stock *Blennodia canescens* covering the dunes in the Simpson Desert, with barely another herb to be seen. Les H spotted a Square-tailed Kite flying above Latrobe St in Ballarat.

Andy A recorded a Yellow Admiral Butterfly *Vanessa itea* on strawberry flowers and Blue-banded Bees on Yellow (aquatic) Iris at Insignia, Alfredton on Nov. 30.

Steve S told us about a male Emu with about 20 young chicks drinking in a puddle by the side of the Silver City Highway south of Broken Hill in late Sept. Shirley Faull told us about a couple of art exhibitions on the Mornington Peninsula over Summer, one focusing on birds at the Mornington Peninsula Art Gallery and one themed "Man and animals" at the McClelland Gallery. John P remarked on the prolific numbers of orchids and lilies flowering this year. He has never seen so many, nor found them in so many places in the Ballarat and Creswick area.

Emily N commented that the excellent winter/ spring rains seemed to have promoted a lot of germination of orchids from seeds rather than just the usual regeneration from tubers. Emily also described the excitement of the "re-discovery" of the Plain-lip Spider-orchid *Caladenia clavigera* in "the Sandy Patch" at Enfield State Park, found in several colonies. Fairies Aprons are flowering well at Dereel Lagoon and Mt Beckworth, and the Sacred Kingfishers are nesting at her property in Scarsdale along with two pairs of Kookaburras.

CALENDAR 2017

February

Fri 3		*Rediscovering our club's history* - Susan Kruss, PhD student, Fed University
Sun 5	am	Exc: *Scotsburn fire recovery* - J Gregurke, club member
	pm	Bill Murphy's 90th birthday celebrations at Rosebank
Tues 28		Committee meeting - John Gregurke's

March

Fri 3	*AGM & club images: Insect and plant interaction*
Sun 5	Exc.: *Western Treatment plant* - J Gregurke & P Dalman, club members

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Committee

President	John Gregurke
Vice Pres	Fran Hanrahan
Secretary	Emily Noble
Treasurer	Les Hanrahan

Claire Dalman
Peter Dalman
Bill Elder
Val Hocking
John Mildren
Andy Arnold

Correspondence: PO Box 328W, Ballarat West, 3350

Email:Secretary:- Emily Noble
Editor: Fran Hanrahan

Website: http://fieldnatballarat.wordpress.com

Club email: ballaratfnc@gmail.com

Meetings are held at the Primary Industries Training Centre, cnr of Gillies and Gregory Sts, on the first Friday of the month at 7.30pm..

Excursions: Leave from the carpark at the Primary Industries Training Centre, cnr Gillies and Gregory Sts. at 9.30 am, unless otherwise advised.

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